



florencecrittenton's

Center for Pregnant & Parenting Teens

Mister Chair and Members of the subcommittee.

My name is Pam Ponich-Hunthausen and I am the Clinical Director of the Florence Crittenton Home and Services here in Helena. Florence Crittenton serves at-risk teen parents and their babies and is the only licensed maternity home in Montana. Most of our referrals come from DPHHS Child and Family Services Division workers as there are a disproportionate number of teen moms who have grown up in the foster care system and are therefore in the custody of the State. Additionally, teen parents are at a high risk to abuse and/or neglect their children so frequently come to the Department's attention due to these issues. While we receive some funding for these young moms and babies through DPHHS for which we are very grateful, it is important to note that there are never enough dollars to cover the cost of care for these young moms and babies, nor is there adequate funding to place all young at-risk parents and babies who could benefit from our services.

Our contract through DPHHS pays LESS THAN HALF of the daily cost of care for these highly vulnerable young families. And while there is at least a mechanism to help pay for the care of the teen mom, there is very little funding to meet the needs of the babies and toddlers in our care who are at the highest risk of abuse and neglect. When a baby is placed in our care due to a concern for her safety and we provide 24-hour care, support and training we are not paid for this service despite the fact that we are pouring our expertise and resources into these highly vulnerable families.

However, we are extremely motivated by our vision to "Change the Future, Two Lives at a Time" and so put an extraordinary amount of time and energy into grant writing and fund-raising so that we can continue to serve these young moms and their babies. But every year it gets tougher to meet our growing budget demands; while food, utility, gas and insurance costs continue to rise every year, the amount of funding we can count on through the State does not increase (and is, in fact always vulnerable to budget cuts) so we have to make up more and more of the difference through our fund-raising efforts, increasingly more challenging in our tenuous economy.

As a native Montanan and a long-time advocate for children and families in our state, it continually frustrates me how we tend to under-allocate our financial resources to our most precious resources – our children. Research tells us that without early intervention and prevention services to children, they are far more likely to need costly long-term mental health, correctional and social services. With a little more effort early in the lives of our most at-risk citizens, e.g., the children that come to the attention of the Department of Family Services, we could save so much money in the long run. Please keep this in mind as you do the hard work of allocating Montana's resources in the most fiscally responsible way.

We have an amazing opportunity to impact not only this current generation, but the next (and the next, and the next) but cannot continue to do this important work without the full support of DPHHS and the legislature. On behalf of the staff of Florence Crittenton, I would like to genuinely thank you all for your hard work and service.

changing the future ... two lives at a time

Feb. 4, 2011

Mr. . Chair and members of the committee: my name is Stephanie Heitman.

I am here representing Florence Crittenton Home and all the teen moms in Montana. I have a big fear of speaking in front of people. The funding for social services like Florence Crittenton is so important to me that I am facing that fear --- for me, my daughter and all those other moms. *So I'm pretty nervous.*

- I am 17 years old. My daughter, Kristina, is a year and a half. For most of my teen years, I was in trouble. My whole life was in trouble. After my baby was born, my social worker told me I just needed to turn my life around. So she helped me get into Florence Crittenton about 4 months ago and they are really helping me turn my life around!
- When I first came to Florence Crittenton, I hadn't been in school for 2 years. My case worker and all the people at Florence Crittenton wanted me to graduate from high school, for me and for my daughter. The people at Florence have helped me out a lot. They have taught me better parenting, and how to meet my daughter's needs. Kristina says words now, eats with a fork and is almost potty trained.
- I have learned about good nutrition in the independent living program. Now I know how to plan balanced meals, save money at the grocery store, and I cook lots of things from scratch! My independent living instructor, Maureen, taught me how to make my own baby food – it's much cheaper and healthier for Kristina.
- I am going to school and doing really well. I make sure I go every day. Once I get my reading level up to 9th grade, I can go to *Access to Success* in June and it will take me about 3 years to earn my high school diploma. Then I hope to go to college to become a nurse or a cosmetologist. I also want to learn photography.
- Finishing college will help me support my daughter and provide the things we need. I want to be a strong role model for her, so she will know I completed school even though it was a big challenge as a teen mom. I believe my example will help her make good decisions about school when she is my age.
- If I hadn't been able to live at Flo Crit, and learn the things I have, I would still be drinking and smoking pot and pushing everyone away. Instead I really have turned my life around and I'm succeeding in making good choices every day.
- I used to let other people tell me what to do. I followed the crowd, no matter if they were doing right or wrong. Now I do what's right for me and Kristina. It might change the friends I hang out with, but it will be worth it.
- All the staff at Florence Crittenton , especially my Case Manager, Aleece; my therapist, Maria and my independent living teacher, Maureen, have helped me find my voice and choose the right way, for myself and my daughter.
- **I used to be a follower. Now I'm becoming a leader.**

Thank you for allowing me to tell you my thoughts on continuing funding of Department of Family Services. The funding allows programs like the one I'm in at Florence Crittenton to continue to help young mothers like me.



February 5, 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee,

My name is Maureen Shaughnessy. I am the Independent Living Training Coordinator at Florence Crittenton here in Helena. You heard from Pam Ponich, our clinical director, an overview of the services we offer at-risk teen mothers and their children. You also know already that there is great need and inadequate funding to serve all of the at-risk teen parents and babies who could benefit from our services.

I have a background as a landscape architect, writer and artist. I raised my two sons for 15 years as a single mom right here in Helena, while running my own business. I made use of government assistance when my kids were very young but quickly transitioned to supporting myself and my children without staying in the system. My sons are now thriving adults and I'm soon to be a grandmother.

How did I end up teaching life skills at a therapeutic group home for pregnant and parenting teens? Well, my 58 years of life experience count for something. Plus, I love teaching and helping others. I love teenagers and little kids. And I was ready to move from a business where I mostly worked with privileged families who could afford to hire a landscape architect, to a job where I could help those who are less fortunate. A friend of mine mentioned Florence Crittenton was looking for good direct care staff. I called, had an interview and was offered the job the next day. My goal was to re-energize the Independent Living Training program using my energy, enthusiasm and talents. Boy has it been a wonderful, wild ride. And by the way, *every one of my co-workers* at Florence Crittenton is as passionate about serving these young mothers and babies, as I am.

Our Independent Living program is based on individualized life skills training in areas such as nutrition, budgeting, employment skills and career exploration. Our clients learn about reproductive health, self care, communication and relationships. They experience success in getting their first job – and keeping it -- obtaining a driver's license; sticking with school, and making their food dollars stretch.

Marcie, age 19, had never slept on a bed with sheets and a blanket until she came to Florence Crittenton. After we realized she was sleeping on top of her bedspread every night, we taught her how to make a bed, use a top *and* bottom sheet, and to wash her sheets every week.

Adele started our program believing she already knew everything there was to know about budgeting and marriage, managing a household and parenting. The *power* of her relationships with our staff helped open her mind – enough that she completed our entire program and is now well on her way to a healthy, balanced life. Her daughter is happy and beautiful. They both blossomed at Florence Crittenton.

You just heard *Stephanie* speak -- she told you she has a huge fear of speaking in public. As part of my work with this future voter, I brought her to the Capitol yesterday and encouraged her to stand at the

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podium in this very room and try out the microphone. I showed her around the House and Senate chambers, and explained how a bill progresses to become law in our legislature. I talked to her about the appropriation process and how difficult it must be to have to decide where to cut funds, and how to balance a state's budget just the way she is learning to stick to her own budget. The very process of deciding to testify, discovering that she cares about others like herself enough to face her fears, then actually getting up in front of you all a few minutes ago – hopefully Stephanie will always remember this and know that she *has* the power to create change.

From a shy self-effacing young woman, Stephanie has, in 4 short months, accepted who she really is: strong and capable and smart. She has become a peer leader at the home and our staff often remark that they will “take 12 Stephanie’s” in a heartbeat.

Stephanie had many challenges growing up. Although her story would sadden and amaze you, hers is not a unique or rare circumstance. There are *so many* teens like Stephanie who become parents before they are done being kids themselves -- teens who desperately need our therapeutic services, including attachment bonding therapy, parenting classes and daily modeling of how to empathize with and care for their babies, when all they really want to do is chill with their friends or sleep til noon.

Stephanie has learned from her time at Florence Crittenton that she isn't invisible, that she *matters* as much as anyone. Thank you for the service you perform in balancing our state's budget. I know the choices you have to make are never easy. Please support the DPHHS budget and make sure young women like Marcie, Adele and Stephanie always know they are valued, worthwhile and very, very visible.